

State Superintendent's Student Advisory Board **Fall 2013**



2013 2014

Superintendent Denise Juneau

The Student Advisory Board is part of Graduation Matters Montana,
an initiative to increase the number of Montana students
who graduate from high school through collaborative partnerships with schools,
community organizations, businesses and youth.

"Students are counting on us to set high expectations for them, provide them with opportunities to explore their career interests, and open up doors to mentorship while they are in high school. As adults, we need to work together to break down the barriers our students face in achieving their dreams in order to create a brighter economic future for all Montanans."

Superintendent of Public Instruction
Denise Juneau

Student Advisory Board Fall Summit 2013

Superintendent Denise Juneau's 2013-2014 Student Advisory Board (SAB) assembled for the Fall Summit on October 27-28, 2013 in Helena. The theme of the Summit was "Student Wellness" and SAB members discussed with Superintendent Juneau ways that schools, communities and students can encourage healthy choices. As Superintendent Juneau stated, "Student wellness is directly connected to student success."



The SAB is comprised of 40 high school students from 31 Montana schools. Members were nominated by local school staff and community members and completed an application process for selection to the board. Board members, in grades 9-12, travelled from rural communities such as Wibaux and Eureka and from larger communities like Great Falls and Missoula. The SAB reflects the diverse backgrounds, interests and experiences of Montana students. The board consists of National Honor Society members, athletes, Native American leaders, ranchers, artists, members of musical bands, video gamers, valedictorians, and students who dropped out and reenrolled.

Board members and chaperones gathered at ExplorationWorks!, a hands-on science center, for an evening reception. Following a welcoming by Superintendent Juneau, Student Advisory Board alumnus and current Carroll College sophomore Sapphire Carter presented an American Indian viewpoint of holistic wellness. The next day, the SAB gathered with Superintendent Juneau at the Montana Wild facility for a full day of discussions and activities.

Travis Burdick and BaLeigh Harper from *Power Up, Speak Out* engaged the SAB members in a lively presentation on how to have equitable, violence-free relationships. Students talked about how to recognize healthy and unhealthy relationships. How do they feel, how do they act and what kind of things do they say when they are in a healthy relationship? Conversely, if people are in an unhealthy relationship, what kinds of behaviors do they exhibit?



One of the points of discussion was what it means to be a bystander. The word “bystander” is passive and doesn’t encourage people to act on someone else’s behalf. Travis and BaLeigh encouraged the group to see themselves as “upstanders,” people who speak up for themselves and for others. To learn more about *Power Up, Speak Out!*, check out their website at www.powerupspeakout.org.

SAB Wellness Priorities and Recommendations

SAB members self-selected four areas they think are crucial to student wellness in Montana, discussed the relevance of the issue to them as students and addressed what schools can do and what students can do to encourage healthier choices.

1. Suicide

Significance to students: Many SAB members say they know people who have taken their own lives or have considered it. Members were aware of Montana’s high rate of suicide and the higher rate for American Indian students. Members described the “rough and tough” attitude of Montana as contributing to students being unable to discuss depression and personal problems.

Suggestions for school support: SAB members recommended more peer mentoring, one-on-one connections between teachers and students, and more access to counselors to increase opportunities for students to discuss troubling issues. The members also emphasized the importance of the availability of activities to stay active, involved and healthy.

Suggestions for student support: SAB members emphasized the need to be available for one another and to encourage each other to be involved in school through clubs, sports, and other activities. Peer to peer counseling was recommended as well.

Research

- According to the *Montana Strategic Suicide Prevention Plan*, Montana has been at or near the top in the nation for the rate of suicide for over three decades. The highest rate of suicide in Montana is among American Indians (27.2 per 100,000) followed by Caucasians (22.2 per 100,000).¹
- National Association of School Psychologists states that because adolescents spend a substantial part of their day in school under the supervision of school personnel, effective suicide prevention can be obtained with supportive mental health services, an engaged school community, and a positive school climate that encourages trustful student/adult relationships.²

2. Alcohol and Smoking

Significance to students: SAB members described the prevalence of these unhealthy choices in their schools and its effect on public safety, peer relationships and general well-being.

Suggestions for school support: SAB members recommended more activities to discourage “boredom drinking”, i.e. opening up gyms on the weekend. Members also discussed the importance of continuing education on the dangers of unhealthy choices. Displaying a wrecked car that resulted from drinking and driving is an effective reminder to teens. Members stressed the importance of community involvement in curbing teen drinking and tobacco use.

Suggestions for student support: Leading by example and having student support systems were recommendations by SAB members to reduce the use of alcohol and smoking.

Research

- About 40 percent of adolescents' waking hours are discretionary-not committed to such activities as eating, school, homework, chores, or working for pay-and many young adolescents spend virtually all of this time without companionship or supervision by responsible adults (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development 1992). Discretionary time outside of school represents an enormous potential for either desirable or undesirable behaviors, such as alcohol or other drug use. Several studies have found that young adolescents who are more likely to be without adult supervision after school have significantly higher rates of alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana use than do adolescents receiving more adult supervision (Mulhall et al. 1996; Richardson et al. 1993).³



3. Nutrition

Significance to students: SAB members discussed nutrition as key to wellness and good nutrition as being important to their energy levels.

Suggestions for school support: SAB members suggested a mandated 45 minute lunch period, allowing more time to eat healthier. Larger portions, more variety and local foods would also add to the improvement of the students' lunch experience.



Research

- Students need longer lunches to eat better. According to the Center for Ecoliteracy, teaching kids to grab their food and eat it on the run means they'll pay less attention to meals and what they're eating in the long run.⁴
- "By nourishing the brain with healthy food and water, you will optimize the internal environment, enabling students to truly engage in the classroom environment and achieve their potential."⁵

– Philippa Norman MD, MPH



4. Mental Well-being

Significance to students: SAB members emphasized that the whole school environment has a tremendous impact on mental well-being. SAB members from rural communities felt that the effect of even one person can have an impact on the whole community.

Suggestions for school support: SAB members recommended several supports: each teacher having assigned student advisees, peer to peer counseling, require club and activity involvement, more school counselors, support healthy relationships with teachers and other school adults.

Suggestions for student support: SAB members emphasized each other's role in talking openly, listening, and encouraging each other to make healthy choices.

Research

- The National Institute of Mental Health states one in ten children suffer from a mental health disorder and that students suffering from these ailments are at a serious risk of academic failure and are more likely to drop out.⁶
- The Center for Mental Health in Schools states that "advancing mental health in schools is about much more than expanding services and creating full service schools. It is about establishing comprehensive, multifaceted approaches that help ensure schools are caring and supportive places that maximize learning and well-being and strengthen students, families, schools, and neighborhoods."⁷



SAB Topics of Interest

SAB members were also eager to discuss with Superintendent Juneau issues not directly related to student well-being but topics that the members felt were important to their school success.

1. Dual Credit/AP Classes

Significance to students: SAB members discussed the importance of these classes in giving them greater academic challenge and helping them to be more competitive when applying to colleges.

Suggestions for school support: SAB members, especially those from the smaller, more rural communities, stressed their desire to have more dual credit and AP classes offered. The students also suggested that schools give students the option of testing out of certain classes.

Suggestions for student support: SAB members need to continue to discuss this need with their administrators.

Research

- A recent study by the Community College Research Center shows that once in college, students who had taken dual enrollment courses received higher grade point averages (GPA) and persisted in completing a college credential at a rate greater than their peers. Unlike advanced placement and international baccalaureate programs, dual enrollment classes carry college credit and are not dependent on a particular score on a standardized testing instrument before a college will grant credit for the various courses taken in these programs.⁸
- More than 75% of graduating seniors indicate interest in pursuing higher education, yet more than half will abandon their studies before completion (Kim, Kirby, & Bragg, 2006). As Farrell and Seifert's (2007) Arizona case study demonstrated, only a quality program will lead to acceptance by all stakeholders. In addition, the fiscal benefits of dual-enrollment programs can include savings for the students, their parents, and the state. Most importantly, these programs may help create an important bridge or link between secondary and postsecondary education, helping to guide students in continuing their learning at either a community college or four-year college or university.⁹

2. Attendance Policy (10 Day Rule)

Significance to students: SAB members contended that this policy, which is common in local school districts, actually has the ability to discourage attendance once they have 10 absences. They also felt it was detrimental to important family and personal time obligations and takes away certain freedoms.

Suggestions for school support: Suggestions for alternative policies were discussed. One option introduced by SAB members is to have an absence policy similar to the work place with allowed absences, such as sick leave, and accrual of unused absences.

Suggestions for student support: SAB members agreed to encourage others to attend school and to not participate in events that encourage skipping school.

Research

- Systemic solutions to attendance problems will originate from a system that is made up of teachers and administrators who understand the importance and interconnectedness of supporting climate, significant relationships, engaging and challenging content and instruction, and rules, policies and procedures.¹⁰
—Wagstaff, Combs, & Jarvis, 2000
- There are current innovative practices related to attendance policies in Graduation Matters Montana schools. For example, Great Falls High School does not have a 10 day policy but offers an attendance incentive policy. Students can be exempt from semester assessments based on the number of excused absences and grades.

3. Hands On Learning

Significance to students: Learning is easier for most students when they are allowed to learn by doing, SAB members stated.

Suggestions for school support: SAB members suggested more classroom experiments and activities like doing skits in a history class.

Suggestions for student support: SAB members recommended that students speak up and ask teachers for more hands on learning opportunities.

Research

- A Purdue University study has found that the best way to get students interested in engineering and technology at an early age may be to focus less on textbooks and more on interactive, problem-solving design projects. "In every area we tested, the students who were involved in a hands-on project learned more and demonstrated a deeper understanding of the issues than the traditional group," Dark said. "This is a significant finding because it proves that with some students — especially groups traditionally underrepresented in science and engineering — the book-and-lecture format may not be the best way to engage students in learning."¹¹



Endnotes

- 1 Montana Strategic Suicide Prevention Plan 2013. Montana Department of Public Health & Human Services
- 2 NASP Resources, Preventing Youth Suicide – Tips for Parents and Educators, http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/suicideprevention.aspx
- 3 “Strategies to Prevent Underage Drinking,” Kelli A. Komro, M.P.H, Ph.D., and Traci L. Toomey, M.P.H., and Ph.D., National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh26-1/5-14.htm>
- 4 “Rethinking Lunchtime,” Michael Stone, Center for Ecoliteracy, <http://www.ecoliteracy.org/essays/rethinking-lunchtime-making-lunch-integral-part-education>
- 5 “Feeding the Brain for Academic Success: How Nutrition and Hydration Boost Learning”, Healthy Brain for Life, Philippa Norman MD, MPH, <http://www.healthybrainforlife.com/articles/school-health-and-nutrition/feeding-the-brain-for-academic-success-how>
- 6 “Promoting Mental Health in Middle Level and High School”, National Association of Secondary Principals, <http://www.principals.org/Content.aspx?topic=57948>
- 7 “Mental Health in Schools: An Overview”, Center for Mental Health in Schools, <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/aboutmh/mhinschools.html>
- 8 “What we know about dual enrollment”, Community College Research Center, February 2012
- 9 “Dual enrollment, multiple paths, and diverse students: a look at options for enhancing entry into postsecondary education”, John Cech, MSU-Billings and Bruce Wendt, Ph.D., Billings West High School, The Montana Professor, Spring 2009
- 10 “Solving High School Attendance Problems: A Case Study”, Mark Wagstaff, Linda Combs and Brenda Jarvis. The Journal of At-Risk Issues.
- 11 “Study: Hands-on projects may be best way to teach engineering and technology concepts”, Kim Medaris, Purdue University News, January 28, 2009, <https://news.uns.purdue.edu/x/2009a/090128DarkStudy.html>

State Superintendent's Student Advisory Board Members 2013-2014

Members:

Alexander (A.J.) Blackburn	Fergus High School
Andy Russell	Bigfork High School
Ashley Saunders	Linderman Education Center
Austin Waldbillig	Granite High School
Benjamin "Luke" Kendall	Stevensville High School
Beth Sutter	Custer County District High School
Caleb Dexter	Hardin High School
Caleb Fickas	Noxon High School
Charity Ratliff	Hardin High School
Chloe Autio	Hellgate High School
Courtney Coburn	White Sulphur Springs High School
David Fugate	Harrison High School
Emilio Bravo	St. Ignatius High School
Jonathan Sherrod	Lincoln High School
Josiah Anderson	Hobson High School
Judi-Ann Doney	Havre High School
Kathryn Stein	Lincoln County High School
Khyree Harper	Laurel High School
Kylie Lutes	Park High School
Layne Johnson	Froid High School
Leslie Red Dog Jr	Paris Gibson Education Center
LoRae Hartman	Hobson High School
Marcus Richards	Victor High School
MariBeth Rider	Skyview High School
Maxine Plain Feather	Plenty Coups High School
Megan Gordon	Blackfeet Learning Academy
Nicolas Wahl	Skyview High School
Pamela Fawns	Hamilton High School
Rabe Whitford	Cut Bank High School
Rafael Vega	Big Sky High School
Reed Lone Fight	Billings West High School
Ryan Vicek	Alberton High School
Saundra Chiefstick	Capital High School
Shaelynn Tellez	Absarokee High School
Sharidan Russell	Polson High School
Shelbi Fitzpatrick	Cut Bank High School
Walt Zeimer	Wibaux High School
Zachary Felsman	Arlee High School



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